

Connecticut State Department of Education

October 2009

Reminders and Updates on H1N1 Influenza Guidance for Schools

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) along with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has developed guidance for school nurses regarding H1N1 influenza which is available at http://www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch/lib/ctfluwatch/h1n1/school_nurse_guidance.pdf.

This guidance includes information on: social distancing; school closures; monitoring illness; at risk students; exclusion policies; education; isolation; prevention; cleaning; and school sponsored vaccination clinics. Because of the delay in the vaccination distribution, it is important to continue to stress prevention, education and encourage staff and students to stay home if ill with influenza symptoms. DPH has also identified school nurses and nurse practitioners as a priority for the vaccine in hopes of minimizing any shortage of school nurses due to exposure to H1N1 influenza. DPH and CSDE continue to support that decisions regarding the management of H1N1 Influenza in schools should be a collaborative effort between the local school district and the local health department. Additional resources regarding H1N1 Influenza are available at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2604&Q=322396>.

The CSDE has also reviewed and outlined some additional recommendations that need to be considered in the event of H1N1 influenza outbreaks. These include:

1. **Reporting School Closures:** School districts are asked to report all school closings due to H1N1 influenza to the CDC through the CSDE Web site at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2604&Q=322396>. The CDC provides updates on school closures to the CSDE as they are reported.
2. **Attendance Policies:** School districts need to review and evaluate attendance policies such as rewards for perfect attendance. These practices may encourage ill students to attend school rather than follow the guidance of encouraging ill students to stay home.
3. **Waivers for the 180 day and 900 hours of instruction requirement pursuant to Section 10-16 of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.):** Waivers will be considered by CSDE on an individual, case-by-case basis. However, school districts must exhaust all other options to make up the days before June 30, 2010 (e.g., eliminating vacations, holidays and extending the school year) prior to requesting a waiver. Given the possibility of additional waves of H1N1 influenza outbreaks in the spring, districts should not request waivers until all options have been exhausted.
4. **Outbreaks of H1N1 influenza during the state testing period:** The Bureau of Student Assessment at the CSDE is prepared to address both mild and severe disruptions should large number of students be absent or extended school closures occur during the standardized testing period. In the event of either of these situations, the CSDE will provide technical assistance and guidance to school districts as needed.
5. **Continuity of Learning:** The issue of continuity of learning in individual districts should be considered in the event of prolonged school closures. Many school districts already use technology to post homework and lesson activities (e.g., School Notes, district Web sites, and

Moodle) and these venues may be useful to districts as they address continuity of learning in the event of school closures. Districts need to determine or review:

- the purpose of the learning opportunities that are provided (i.e., keeping students engaged vs. offering credit for the learning activities);
- the district policy on granting credit for out of class activities and assignments;
- how students would access information (i.e., web access, mailing packets, local television and radio stations, or telephone contacts);
- any special considerations or difficulties associated with the various delivery methods, such as internet or on-line learning; and
- how the same learning opportunities are provided to all students including special education students.

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) has issued guidance regarding continuity of learning which is available at <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/guidance/continuity-recs.pdf>. Specific resources regarding online learning are available at <http://www.inacol.org/col/providers.php>.

6. **Feeding Students during a H1N1 Influenza school closure:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided a mechanism using the summer food service program or the seamless summer program regulations to allow school districts to provide meals to students during a school closure due to H1N1 influenza. In this situation, the local school district or a community organization would have to develop a plan to provide meals to children, targeting students who are eligible for free and reduced meals. Based on the plan which would include the distribution method, local communities would apply to CSDE, Child Nutrition Programs for a waiver. The guidance from USDA provides information and directions to implement food service programs and is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/pandemic/default.htm>.

In addition to the recommendations above, **the USDOE in a document entitled *Guidance on Flexibility and Waivers for State Education Agencies, Local Education Agencies, Postsecondary Institutions, and other Grantee and Program Participants in Responding to Pandemic Influenza (H1N1 Virus)*** provides guidance on numerous areas including:

- a. Elementary and Secondary Education Issues (page 1-4);
- b. Requirements under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (pages 4-7);
- c. Adult Education and Career and Technical Education Programs (page 7);
- d. FERPA requirements (page 18-19); and
- e. Distribution of Flu Vaccine at School Facilities (page 19-20).

Each section addresses the implications of a prolonged school closure or other disruptions in the regular educational services to students, addresses legal questions that may arise for school administrators when faced with a H1N1 INFLUENZA outbreak, and discusses generally the possibility of waiving requirements or finding other flexibility in federal education laws and regulations. For the complete guidance, please see the attachment entitled *USDOE Flexibility and Waivers*.

Finally, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Guidance on H1N1 Influenza includes many useful tools for school districts and local health departments in making decisions on prevention, education, communication and community mitigation. Some of these tools include:

- *CDC Guidance for State and Local Public Health Officials and School Administrators for School (K-12) Responses to Influenza during the 2009-10 School Year*
 - This document provides guidance to help decrease the spread of flu among students and school staff during the 2009-10 school year. This document expands upon earlier school guidance documents by providing a menu of tools that school and health officials can choose from based on conditions in their area. It recommends actions to take this school year and suggests strategies to use if CDC finds that the flu starts causing more severe disease. The guidance also provides a checklist for making decisions at the local level.
- *Technical Report for State and Local Public Health Officials and School Administrators on CDC Guidance for School (K - 12) Responses to Influenza during the 2009-10 School Year.*
 - The document expands upon earlier school guidance documents by providing a menu of tools that school and health officials can choose from based on conditions in their area. It recommends actions to take this school year, suggests strategies to consider if CDC finds that the flu starts causing more severe disease than during the spring 2009 outbreak, and provides a checklist for making decisions at the local level.
- *Preparing for the Flu: A Communication Toolkit for Schools (Grade K -12)*
 - The purpose of *Preparing for the Flu: A Communication Toolkit for Schools* is to provide basic information and communication resources to help school administrators implement recommendations from CDC's *Guidance for State and Local Public Health Officials and School Administrators for School (K-12) Responses to Influenza during the 2009-10 School Year*

All of this information as well as many other resources are all available at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/schoolguidance.htm>.

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